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ABSTRACT

As a professional development tool, coaching is a process of systematic observation of another's instructional behavior with subsequent nonjudgemental feedback. It is a natural follow-up to a recent training event or experience and is extensively used within industrial contexts. Well-trained feedback personnel, including peers, team leaders, master teachers, career ladder representatives, building principals, and school district supervisors, are essential to coaching success. Several coaching programs at the college and school district level are described to illustrate the various ways that staff development coaching can be conducted. (CB)

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COACHING FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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COACHING FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Transfer of training is a concept currently pervasive in adult learning literature. Professional journals of teaching, nursing, personnel, and training have all recently addressed the issue with vigor. Transfer of training articles have also recently surfaced in journals of medicine and pharmacy, where they have been noticeably absent. And all of the models, each with its own nomenclature such as master teachers, nursing preceptors, personnel mentors, and training coaches add to the widely held notion that training is only as successful as its follow-up within the clinical setting. (Lorey, 1977), (Halatin, 1981), (Wehrenberg, 1987), (Lawrie, 1987,), (Lee, 1987), (Padgett, 1987), (Metzger, 1986), (Lawrence, 1982).

While drawing from a variety of professions, the primary emphasis of this article will be upon staff development for teachers. With the increasing sophistication of in-service training, staff development efforts have grown both in number and success. Recognized exemplary programs include the Roanoke, Virginia Workshop for Instructional Skills Enhancement (WISE), Pittsburgh's Schenley High School Teacher Center, St. Cloud, Minnesota's Staff Performance Review and Development Model (SPRAD), and Westminster, Maryland's hands-on Elementary Science Program, (Miller et al, 1987). Each of these programs employs a different facet of a time-tested and recently resurrected staff development process, coaching.

As a professional development tool, coaching is a process of systematic observation of another's instructional behavior with subsequent non-judgmental feedback. It is a natural follow-up to a recent training event or experience, and is extensively used within industrial contexts.

For successful coaching to take place, well-trained feedback personnel need to be the fulcrum of effort. These personnel could include peers, team leaders, master teachers, career ladder professionals, building principals, or school district supervisors. William Spohn, Superintendent of Schools, Rockport, Mass., uses a four stage model to improve the coaching skills of the district's supervisory personnel including planning, diagnosis, monitoring, and performance evaluation (Spohn, 1987). His model traverses both types of coaching: coaching for remediation with an accompanying action plan, and following training, coaching for professional development.

The predominate remediation model of coaching (Stowell, Starcevich, 1987), (Frigo, 1986) focuses primarily on work behavior which is not sufficiently productive. Employee absence, tardiness, and lack of appropriate skill level are confronted by immediate supervisors in a supportive and problem-solving posture. Although this model is important for supervisory school personnel, it is not timely as a follow-up to in-service training. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to address the professional development aspect of coaching.

Recent research has shown that training is optimally effective when:

1. It results from a systematic, prior needs assessment;
2. Specific performance, knowledge, and skill outcomes are listed as criteria for training mastery;
3. Immediate supervisors monitor the trainee's subsequent performance with appropriate on-the-job feedback (coaching). (Cohn, 1986).

In-service training for teachers is no different. A George Mason University staff development research effort came to the following conclusions:

1. Teachers want courses that meet read classroom needs.
2. Teachers want more involvement in course design
3. Teachers liked the opportunity to observe each other.
4. Teachers want more courses oriented around peer observations, coaching, team-teaching, and peer evaluation.
5. Teachers want the importance of systematic course follow-ups. (Jones, 1987)

WHAT IS COACHING FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT?

Coaching is a developmental skill building process primarily used in post training, clinical observations. It purports to assist teachers with their implementation of recently acquired skills through a cycle of instruction, observation, and sharing feedback, resulting in either a change in instructional behavior or a solidifying of the skill. This process can be used by most personnel in almost any instructional/observational context. Peer teachers can coach one another; master teachers or team leaders can coach their colleagues, or building principals can coach their faculties. The coaching model bears a nagging similarity to selected aspects of the relationship forged between student teachers and their co-operating/university supervising instructors.

WHY COACHING?

Rather than becoming a new paradigm for staff development, coaching offers specific benefits. Firstly, it is an opportunity for teachers to share ideas and strategies, while honing their own observational skills. It results in an on-going refinement of the craft of teaching.

Secondly, coaching develops a shared language, common knowledge base, and similar instructional expectations, hence, making communication and support simpler. (Joyce Showers, 1982). Two programs from different professional

contexts have used the common learning model successfully, resulting in increased performance and collaboration. One, The New Jersey State Public Manager Program has both its management and supervisory personnel enroll in the same management development program coursework. This practice insures that managers are sufficiently knowledgeable to provide coaching assistance to their supervisory personnel. Supervisors, as part of their program, are required to develop specific action plans with behavioral implementation, reflecting their recent training. Their managers, themselves recently trained, upon observing supervisors, provide informed and skillful feedback, thus mutually completing the coaching cycle. Productivity and morale have increased, due to clear expectations and collaborative problem solving.

The other program, under the auspices of a Title II Education Grant at Westminster College of Salt Lake City, attacked the long-standing problem of university-trained, pre-service teachers having inconsistent expectations with their public school cooperating teachers. The grant brought both pre- and in-service teachers together for a week-long mathematics workshop where the content, methodology and terminology were similar. The resulting group's experiences showed that the commonality factor increased the quality of learning and opportunities for coaching. (Cohn, 1985).

Thirdly, coaching provides a link in a professional development cycle of in-service instruction practice with

guided feedback in the in-service, and actual implementation with observation. Too often, training events' warm and fleeting learning experiences result in little resultant skill building. Follow-up coaching can overcome that malady.

WHO CAN COACH?

With the national movement toward differentiated school staffing, a variety of personnel can provide coaching as part of their contractual responsibilities. Career ladder personnel can realize the goal of on-going staff development by teaching in-service as well as following the participants into classrooms to coach the newly acquired skills in their implementation. Principals who perceive themselves as instructional leaders, too can assist teachers with this same coaching process. Yet the most successful coaching programs are done through peer endeavors, minimizing the power and status differentials (Showers, 1985).

UNIVERSITY FACULTY AS COACHES

In addition to peers, career ladder personnel, and building principals, university faculty can provide effective and lasting coaching for staff development. The model of university supervisors coaching student teachers during their practice teaching is an accepted pre-service tradition. Yet, in addition to occasionally delivering in-service training, how often do university faculty coach the trainees' skills development in on-the-job observation?

The Westminster College Masters Degree in Education does. Paying careful attention to the three characteristics of effective training, that it results from a needs assessment, that specific performance outcomes are required for mastery, and that immediate supervisors monitor subsequent performance, the program offers an integrated theory and practice in-service model for practicing educators. Fully two/thirds of the coursework focuses on clinical "hands on" workshops, with each workshop listing specific skill outcomes and performance expectations. Following the workshops, university faculty visit the trainees' classrooms and monitor the recently learned skills in their implementation. After a decade of existence, a follow-up survey revealed that students regard the supervisory field coaching as one of the program's strengths. (Cohn, 1987).

Another example involving university faculty as coaches is the author's own optional coaching event in a course titled Training and Development." The standard course content included adult learning principles, instructional design, needs assessments, and training methodology with evaluation. Course requirements included writing papers, developing a training manual, and presenting an in-class training event. What was different in the course, however, was the optional on-site instructor's supervisory coaching visit for those employed in training or training related contexts.

A five-year study of course evaluations shows that those students who were visited and whose recently learned skills were coached in their utility in the workplace, experienced greatest course satisfaction. (Cohn, 1987)

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF COACHING?

As educational reform vacillates from model to model and paradigm to paradigm, one notion is certain: there is no one best design or process for teachers' staff development. Nursing educators recognized that in lieu of post-training coaching, the goal attainment scale or self-help checklist is helpful, yet not optimal (Daley, 1987). Most educators realize that without follow-up coaching to in-service training, individual skill level monitoring is adequate at best (Watkins, 1987).

Coaching is an essential staff development tool. If on-going staff development is important for insuring that today's teachers will be competent tomorrow, then coaching is a proven process for accomplishing that. The Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development recently shared some programs which will contribute to the future of staff development. They felt that a successful in-service program should establish peer coaching activities as a follow-up to training (Wagner, 1986) and in doing so, should utilize experienced staff leaders, making available the best experience and practices which now exist in schools (Bush, 1986). Coaching is clearly one of those best practices for facilitating transfer of training.

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